





501  
8444

LIBRARY OF THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
FEB 13 1882

THE

## INCOMPREHENSIBILITY

OF

# GOD'S NATURE AND WAYS.

BY REV. WM. S. ✓ PLUMER, D. D.

---

[FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE AMERICAN NATIONAL PREACHER.]

---

“Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven, what canst thou do? Deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.”—JOB xi. 7—9.

THE nature of God is the foundation of all true religion, and the will of God is the rule of all acceptable worship. Therefore the knowledge of God is of the greatest importance. Without it the people perish. Total ignorance here is total ruin. But to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, is eternal life. To see and acknowledge God in all our ways is an essential part of genuine piety. To fail in so doing is no small part of human wickedness. Our thoughts cannot be too much turned to Him, who is in all, and through all, and above all, and over all, God blessed for ever.

Nor is the mysteriousness of the divine nature and government any reason why we should not seek to know what may be known concerning them. To the carnal and unbelieving the darkness around the nature and ways of God is an occasion of stumbling; but to those who are taught from above it brings pious confidence, deep humility, and adoring reverence. Give one the spirit of adoption and self-renunciation, and he cannot be frightened from the presence of his Maker either by the lustre or the darkness round about his throne. Sages have explored

this subject till wisdom fell asleep over her lesson and pride rose up and uttered great swelling words of vanity and blasphemy; but the humble child of God, thirsting for divine knowledge and sitting at the feet of Jesus, has learned more than the ancients, and has become wise unto salvation.

The doctrine of the text and of this discourse is that THERE IS IN THE NATURE AND WAYS OF GOD MUCH THAT IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO US. In dwelling on this truth it may be stated :

I. That it is agreed on all hands that the adorable first person of the Trinity, the Father, is, and must ever be, beyond the grasp of our senses and faculties. He is the King eternal, immortal, and *invisible*. No man hath seen God at any time. No man can see his face and live. He maketh darkness his pavilions round about him, dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies.

It is no less generally agreed that the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost, is, and ever will be, beyond the direct and immediate notice of all creatures. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit." He broods over the face of nature ; garnishes the heavens ; converts the soul ; opens our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of God's word ; sanctifies our affections ; fills the saints with joy ; fits God's people for glory ; divides his gifts severally as He will, and yet "we know not the way of the Spirit." We never saw him, and we never shall see him as disembodied spirits see each other. We may know him by his word and works, by his enlightening, sanctifying, and comforting influences, but never by sight. He is far beyond the grasp of both our bodily and mental faculties.

The brightest manifestation of the Godhead ever yet made, or ever to be made, is in the incarnation of the Son of God, the second person in the Trinity. We may behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth ; but we can go no further. This manifestation is for all practical purposes sufficient. It is clear and glorious, yet not intolerable by reason of excessive brightness. Christ said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." He thus taught us that the best possible discovery we could make of the Godhead was through the veil of his own flesh. But even in Christ divinity shone forth under great obscuratation. The transfiguration, the ascension in a bright cloud, the appearance to Saul of Tarsus after his ascension, and the glory in which John, the divine, saw him, may give us some faint conception of the effulgence of his everlasting person. But we know him chiefly by his works, and teachings, and sufferings. Thousands saw him with their bodily eyes, and knew no more of God than before. So that we may safely say that God is, and for ever shall be,

wholly unperceivable by any of our senses or faculties. If any object that it is promised that the pure in heart "shall see God," the answer is that all God's word shall be fulfilled; but the meaning of that language evidently is, not that they shall meet God face to face and behold his unveiled divinity, but that they shall enjoy God as revealed in his word, and works, and ordinances, in the person of his Son, and by the influences of his Spirit. Now whatever eludes all our senses and faculties is to us necessarily clad with mysteriousness. Whatever is concealed from every perceptive power excludes the possibility of original knowledge. In such a case, learning without instruction is impossible. The difficulty is heightened by every step we take towards that which is in its nature boundless. But when our thoughts go out after Him, who is absolutely infinite, we are soon enveloped in a profound obscurity, which no created faculties can penetrate.

II. The incomprehensibility of God's nature and ways is often asserted in his word. To cite all the texts pertinent to the proof would be tedious. Take a short selection of them. The book of Job is probably the oldest inspired record. In it we find these words: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea:" "God doeth great things and unsearchable, marvellous things without number:" "He is wise in heart and mighty in strength. \* \* He doeth great things past finding out, yea, and wonders without number." "Lo these are parts of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him:" "God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive with him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters:" "We cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. \* \* With God is terrible majesty. Touching the Almighty we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice. \* \* He respecteth not any that are wise in heart." "Behold God is great, and we know him not:" "God thundereth marvellously with his voice: great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend." The same doctrine is taught by Moses in the Pentateuch, "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God:" by David, "Thy judgments are a great deep:" "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable:" by Asaph, "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known:" by a later Psalmist, "Great is our LORD, and of great power: his understanding is infinite:" by Solomon, "No man can find out the work that God doeth from the beginning to the end:" "Thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all." "The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee:" "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing:" by Isaiah, "Verily thou art a God that

hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour :” “There is no searching of his understanding :” by Jeremiah, “Who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord, and hath perceived and heard his word ?” by Jesus Christ, “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father ; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him ;” “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee : but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me :” by Paul, “The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him ? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God :” “Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor ?” and by John, “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty ; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.”

Here are the words of Moses, who wrote the oldest books of inspiration, and of other men, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, down to the last surviving apostle, whose writings closed the canon of Scripture. The doctrine of the Old and New Testaments, of the prophets, of Jesus Christ, and of his apostles on this subject, is precisely the same. The coming of Christ did not remove the mysteriousness of Jehovah's nature and ways, but rather established it. By opening to our vision amazing fields of thought respecting God's love in Christ, it gave us new and everlasting themes of adoring wonder. God manifest in the flesh was, and is, and ever shall be, itself the sublimest of all mysteries. “Nothing but itself is its parallel.” And no where is the incomprehensibility of God spoken of in Scripture as cause of sorrow to the pious. On the contrary, inspired men exult in it and give thanks. Nor can the doctrine be either alarming or distressing to one, whose hope is set on high, and whose mind has learned to bow in true humility before the majesty of God. It is also clear from one of the texts quoted from Paul, that our inability to find out the Almighty to perfection is not merely moral, but natural. The same would have been true if man had never sinned at all. The same shall still be true when the heavens shall be no more. The passage quoted from John is part of a song sung in heaven. This proves that even heavenly bliss does not require in order to its perfection the understanding of all God's nature and ways. A part of celestial happiness consists in worshipping Him, whose counsels are of old, faithfulness and truth, and who maketh darkness his secret place.

III. So very wonderful are the perfections of God, compared with the attributes of the most exalted creature, that his nature and ways must always be mysterious just in proportion to our knowledge of their extent. God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. All men and angels are finite, the creatures of

yesterday, liable to change, and of themselves—without God—have neither wisdom nor virtue. Man is the very lowest order of rational beings, and has by sin greatly debased himself. He is blinded by many passions and prejudices. “Every man is brutish in his knowledge.” How then should man, as compared with God, have knowledge either extensive or accurate? This is no surprising thing. Our elder and nobler brethren, the elect angels, who have, ever since they were created, stood around the throne of the Eternal, and drunk of the river of truth as it flows forth fresh from its fountain, are yet, as compared with God, foolish and ignorant. “He chargeth his angels with folly.” “Though glorious and holy creatures, they are fallible and mutable, except as upheld and confirmed by the Lord. They execute his wise and righteous counsels; but would soon show their want of wisdom, if trusted to manage any part of the government of the world, according to their own mind. Nay, compared with the infinite knowledge and wisdom of God, they are chargeable with ignorance, being utterly unable to comprehend the vast designs of the great Creator and Lord of the universe; except as he pleases to unfold them. How much less then may man be trusted!” God’s plans embrace all creatures and all worlds. They comprehend the whole universe. The greatest stretch of the human mind never extended to all the affairs of an empire, a province, a city, a family, or even of a person. God’s plans are founded on the most perfect knowledge of all things. Man’s information is very imperfect both in scope and in degree. It would be marvellous if a little child should understand all the measures of a wise ruler. Yet that would be but one finite being comprehending the measures of another. But for a creature to know God’s plans would be for finite to grasp infinite. Until man can hold the sea in the hollow of his hand, measure the azure vault of heaven with a carpenter’s rule, sweep the outskirts of creation with a compass of his own construction, and tell all worlds, and give their number, weight, and measure, let not his arrogance swell to the monstrous bloating of imagining that he can comprehend God. If he does not know all things formed, how can he search out him that formed them?

Man may follow Methuselah through his long career, but at last he dies. Man may compute the number of seconds in a myriad of millions of centuries, but that is not eternity. God’s life-time has neither beginning nor end. “The number of his years cannot be searched out.” “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.” “Thy years are throughout all generations. Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the

same, and thy years shall have no end." "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." A late writer says: "While the spirituality of God's nature places Him beyond the reach of our direct cognizance, there are certain other essential properties of his nature, which place Him beyond the reach of our possible comprehension. Let me instance the past eternity of the Godhead. One might figure a futurity that never ceases to flow, and which has no termination, but who can climb his ascending way among the obscurities of that infinite which is behind him? Who can travel in thought along the track of generations gone by till he has overtaken the Eternity, which lies in that direction? Who can look across the millions of ages which have elapsed, and from an ulterior post of observation look again to another and another succession of centuries; and at each further extremity in this series of retrospects, stretch backward his regards on an antiquity as remote and indefinite as ever? Could we by any number of successive strides over these mighty intervals, at length reach the fountain-head of duration, our spirits might be at rest. But to think of duration as having no fountain-head; to think of time with no beginning; to uplift the imagination along the heights of an antiquity, which hath positively no summit; to soar these upward steepes till, dizzied by the altitude, we can keep no longer on the wing; for the mind to make these repeated flights from one pinnacle to another; and, instead of scaling the mysterious elevation, to lie baffled at its feet, or lose itself among the far, the long withdrawing recesses of that primeval distance, which at length merges away into a fathomless unknown, this is an exercise utterly discomfiting to the puny faculties of man. We are called on to stir ourselves up that we may take hold of God, but the clouds and darkness, which are round about him, seem to repel the enterprise as hopeless, and man, as if overborne by a sense of littleness, feels as if nothing can be done but to make prostrate obeisance of all his faculties before him." If man cannot compute the lifetime of God, how can he comprehend his plans? If he cannot take the dimensions of that Eternity, which is Jehovah's habitation, how can he search out Him who dwelleth therein? "An eternity past puzzles all human comprehension." Yet an eternity to come, if duly considered, no less completely eludes our grasp. It is an important truth that "though we cannot comprehend eternity, yet we can comprehend that there is an eternity." At this plain truth we must stop.

Think, too, of God's omnipresence. He is everywhere. He fills immensity. He is a spirit, and so cannot be divided; yet he is always present in every part of the universe with the whole of his being and nature. He is an infinite spirit, and so no limits can bound him. "He is not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being." "He is a very present help in time of trouble." "Am I a God at hand,

saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? \* \* Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?" "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." The sun is distant from the earth *ninety-five millions* of miles; but *ninety-five millions* of times *ninety-five millions* of miles beyond the sun, and in every other direction, God is as truly present as in heaven itself. Light travels at the rate of more than *one hundred and ninety-two thousand* miles every second; yet there are stars so distant that if a ray of light had left them on the morning that the Israelites went out of Egypt, it would not yet have reached our world. Over the vast blazing universe above us and around us Jehovah presides. There may be points, beyond which there are no inhabited worlds, yet who dare assert even that? But space has no limits. Immensity has no walls, outside of which non-entity has her kingdom. "Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?" The other natural perfections of God are no less admirable and incomprehensible than those already noticed.

But the moral character of God presents, if possible, still greater wonders. At the close of a long and lucid argument respecting it, even blessed Paul could do no more than say, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." Jesus Christ, when on earth, was actuated by very similar sentiments. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Now, if the contemplation of God's moral character produced such exclamations from the man Christ Jesus, and from his servant Paul, it must be a theme of the most exalted nature. It is while speaking of his own moral character, and, especially of his amazing mercy, that God says: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." The same remark is as true of God's holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and faithfulness. Indeed, all God's moral character is presented to our admiration, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, in such a glorious manner, as to have filled heaven and earth with joy ever since the plan of redemption was known. The angels have long desired to look into these things. The regenerate on earth are delighted with them, and the redeemed in glory celebrate them for ever and ever. God's love is as unfathomable as his understanding.

Nothing is more unsearchable than the riches of Christ. None but divinity can comprehend them. There is often a pleasing harmony in music. There is always an admirable harmony in the plans and works of God. But the most delightful and wonderful harmony is that of the divine attributes in man's salvation. Inflexible justice and incomparable mercy, terrible severity and infinite goodness, eternal truth and everlasting kindness, spotless holiness and undying faithfulness, all meet around the cross of Christ, and kiss and embrace each other. No such glorious concord is seen elsewhere but in Jehovah himself.

IV. God has shown himself to be incomprehensible in his works of creation. He doubtless might have made more worlds and more orders of being than he has; yet who knows all the works that God has made? There are known to be more than *eight thousand* species of the beetle alone. The tribes of creatures in our world, which are invisible to the naked eye, are said to be far more numerous than all those which we can see. If the tribes are more numerous, the individuals are probably as hundreds of millions to one. There are supposed to be perceptible by powerful glasses as many as *three or four hundred millions* of fixed stars. If each of these is a sun and the centre of a system of worlds like our own, how vast is the universe! It consists of matter organized and unorganized, and of spirit mortal and immortal. The Bible does not deny that brutes have something in their nature which may be called spirit. But then it teaches that the spirit of a beast goeth downward to the earth, and the spirit of man goeth upward. At death it returns to God, who gave it. All these organisms, animate and inanimate, and all these spirits, mortal and immortal, were called out of non-entity by the Almighty. It is impossible to conceive of any exertion of power greater than that, by which something is made out of nothing. Yet out of nothing God made all things, our bodies and our souls, all we are, all we see, all that is within us, above us, beneath us, around us. Nor did any part of the work of creation cost him any labor. "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." He said, "Let there be light, and there was light." "He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing." "He bindeth up the water in his thick clouds, and the cloud is not rent under them." "The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof." Nothing is too hard for him. He neither groweth faint nor is weary.

Indeed so inscrutable is God in all his ways that perhaps no heathen ever spoke so wisely concerning the divine nature as Simonides, who being asked by Hiero, "What is God?" demanded one day for deliberation. When again asked the same question, he desired two days. As often as the question was repeated he doubled the time. When asked the reason of his conduct, he replied, "The longer I consider the question, the

greater is the darkness in which I am enveloped." Most of our knowledge of God is *negative*. Our *positive* knowledge of him is very limited. Each of his perfections may well be a study for life. We shall never rise to the full elevation of this theme, neither in this life nor in that which is to come. There will ever be toplevel heights of divine knowledge, to which we will look up with inquiring awe.

V. In God's government and providence are several things which must ever make them incomprehensible to us. How noiseless are most of his doings. When in spring Jehovah would reanimate all nature, bring into activity myriads of insects, give growth to millions of seeds, and clothe mountains and valleys in living green, it is all a silent work. When he would subvert a universal monarchy, long before the time set for that purpose, he puts it into the heart of a great ruler to build a bridge, and for that purpose to change the channel of a river for a season. This is all done without signs in heaven, or war in the elements. In the fulness of time the same river is, by means the simplest, diverted from its channel, Belshazzar is slain, Babylon is a prey to the invader, and a universal empire is dissolved. Commonly when God depopulates cities and kingdoms, his messengers pass silently along, and do their work ere men are aware. There was no noise of preparation for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The morning of their eternal overthrow was as calm as any on which the sun had risen upon them. The destroying angel, who slew the first-born of Egypt, spread his mighty wings over the land, and from them dropped down death on every habitation of man and beast. Yet all was quiet as the grave, till the wail of bereavement filled the land with terror. God makes a world with less noise than that produced by man when he makes a coffin. When Jehovah spread out the heavens and set up their unshaken pillars, there was not so much as the sound of a hammer. When on our best railroads we travel at the rate of *sixty* miles an hour, the rumbling noise is heard afar, the sight of our speed is startling to every spectator, and we cannot divest ourselves of apprehension. But ever since we were born we have been riding on a world moved by God at the rate of more than *sixty-two thousand* miles every hour. And yet who has been afraid? who has heard any startling sound? This is the more wonderful because the motion of the earth is not simple but compound. Yet in the midst of all this motion we can hear the chirping of a bird, or the dropping of a pin.

But when God chooses he can make our ears to tingle. By the shaking of a leaf he can startle us, or make us rise up with strange sounds. "The thunder of his power who can understand?" When he shall destroy the world it shall be with sounds that shall awake the dead. "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise." When God chooses to be heard, even the

mountains give ear, and obey his voice. At his rebuke he dries up the sea, and makes the rivers a wilderness. Yet, ordinarily, his footsteps are not heard, and his voice is but the silent going forth of his almighty energy.

In his mysterious providence God also hides his works and ways from man by commonly removing results far from human view. In autumn the husbandman scatters his wheat and buries it under the ground. It dies. Search and you shall find it rotten. The rigors of a long winter are approaching. The unskilled would say this sowing of seed was madness. But wait till summer, and that husbandman shall shout his harvest home. What thus occurs in the natural world is a type of spiritual things. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Much as the result is hoped for, it is not perceived by any mortal. None but God sees the end from the beginning. Whom he would bless he first puts to the test of patient waiting. If the righteous should see the happy issue of all that befalls them, as it lies open before God, their afflictions would be no trials. Had Abraham known that all God would require of him would be to bind Isaac and lay him on the altar, we never should have heard of the illustrious faith of the father of believers. Jacob once cried out, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me." He lived to see that all these things were for him. But at the time of his bereavement he saw not the blessed end, and so his virtue was severely tested. If on the day of crucifixion, as on the day of Pentecost, the disciples had clearly perceived the results of that scene of terror, the Shepherd might have been smitten, but the sheep would hardly have been scattered. The language of God's providence well coincides with that of his promise to all his people, "What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter."

And it is as true of the wicked as of the righteous that they cannot foresee results, and that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." None are more surprised than the wicked at the conclusion of things under God's control. The sinner intends, but God superintends. The creature appoints, but God disappoints. Man proposes, but God disposes. Lazarus was filled with wonder to find himself in Abraham's bosom, but Dives was sore amazed to find himself in hell. Neither Pharaoh, nor Belshazzar, nor Herod, nor Pilate, nor Judas, expected such results to themselves as their wickedness wrought out. As they loved cursing, so it came unto them; as they delighted not in blessing, so it was far from them. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." But the wicked promise themselves life in the midst of all iniquity and unbelief. How sorely will their souls be vexed when they find themselves eternally, hopelessly disappointed.

God's ways respecting means are very remarkable. So far as we can see, he often works without means. Perceiving no causes in operation, we expect no effects. Seeing no disease, we expect no death. Not looking for a casualty, it finds us unprovided with remedies, and we are ready to be swallowed up. As we begin to give up all hope, God steps in and relieves us. When he chooses, he dispenses with all means. He did so when he made the world. Again, God often works by means, which seem to us insignificant. "The death of a man at a critical juncture, his disgust, his retreat, his disgrace, have brought innumerable evils on a whole nation. A common soldier, a child, a girl at the door of an inn, have changed the face of fortune, and almost the face of nature." Will God save Rome from pillage? It shall be done by the cackling of geese. Has a man's appointed time upon earth expired? The sting of a bee, the scratch of a pin, a crumb of bread, or a vernal zephyr shall be the means of his death. Will God prolong the life of Hezekiah? A lump of figs shall have healing efficacy. Moreover, God often works contrary to means. How much malpractice in medicine does he provide against, and thus restore the patient. How many blunders in his ministers does he overrule for good. Christ would give sight to a blind man. He makes clay, puts it on his eyes as if to make him more blind, but he is healed. A terrible fall dislocates a joint. The bone is not put fairly back into its place. Years of lameness and suffering succeed. A second fall, worse than the first, jars the frame, jeopard's life, but restores the bone to its socket, and soon the man walks and leaps and praises God. By death, God destroyed him that had the power of death. God often works contrary to the natural tendency of means.

God also employs such instruments as greatly confound us. Our ignorance and unbelief would choose those whom God rejects, and reject those whom he selects. Will he cure Naaman's leprosy? A little captive maid shall tell him of the prophet of the Lord. Will he lead forth Israel from Egyptian bondage? That little infant in a basket among the rushes, by edict doomed to death as soon as born, shall come to be the deliverer. Will he make Joseph premier of Egypt? His brethren envy and sell him, the Ishmaelites carry him far from all loved ones, Potiphar imprisons him, the iron enters into his flesh; yet in God's providence every step is onward. How often are those whom we never befriended made to minister to our aid and comfort. Must God's people be brought out of Babylon? Cyrus shall send forth the binding decree. This worshipper of the sun dealt as tenderly with God's people as a nurse with her child. It would not have been more wonderful to see the wolf nourishing and protecting the lamb and the kid. Who would have supposed that God would choose a raven to feed Elijah, the boy Samuel to bear heavy tidings to Eli, or the youth Jeremiah to pull down, destroy and build up kingdoms? God would exalt his Son and

give him a name, which is above every name. He is made flesh, born in a manger, is subject to his parents, is tempted, mocked, spit upon, betrayed, denied, condemned, crucified, dead and buried, yet all ends in his exaltation. He, who had made swaddling-bands for the sea, was laid in swaddling clothes that he might be the first-born among many brethren. By falling he arose above all his enemies, above all the creatures of God.

Will God regenerate a world? It shall not be done by the ministry of angels, but to the poor, condemned, and dying, the riches of his mercy shall be borne in earthen vessels. Will God subdue the world to knowledge, to peace, and righteousness? Humble men shall be his ambassadors. Will he make of his people a glorious church? "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the word and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence." Look at that good man surrounded by an infuriated throng. Each one gnashes with his teeth, and is keen for his prey. At the giving of the signal, stone follows stone. Gash after gash is made on the pious sufferer. The blood streams from his head and body. Hard by him stands a small young man, drinking in with malignant joy the groans that fall from the martyr's lips. Like a young tiger, hitherto fed on milk, but now tasting blood, he becomes furious against all who call on the name of Jesus. He breathes out threatenings and slaughter. He sheds innocent blood without remorse and without cessation. Who would believe that this persecutor was the chosen of God, and should yet, with unparalleled zeal and incredible success, preach Jesus, call sinners to repentance, and give joy and courage to the trembling disciples? Yet such was God's plan, and it was all executed. God is a sovereign. His counsel shall stand. He will do all his pleasure. He rejected all the seven elder sons of Jesse, and chose the little boy, David, who had been left with the sheep, and made him king of his people, and the sweet singer of Israel. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." Most of the great, useful, and honored men of the next generation are now poor boys, unnoticed by the proud, buffeting difficulties, and forming vigorous characters under the influence of neglect and adversity.

We often tremble to see God pursuing a course which, to our short sight, seems quite contrary to the end to be gained. This is for two purposes. The first is to humble us, and thus prepare us for the reception of his great blessings. The other is to prove that "besides him there is no Saviour." The thorn in Paul's flesh was sharp and painful, and brought from him very bitter cries. Then came the assurance, "My grace is sufficient for

thee." When mountains and waters and cruel Egyptians hedged in the Israelites on every side, and it was manifest that "in vain was the help of man," then came the word, "Stand still and see the salvation of God," and the sea was cleft in twain, and its waves became walls. "In the mount, it shall be seen," is for a saying in Israel. Even the gospel was not sent till men had racked their inventions, and were at their wits' end. "After that the world, by wisdom, knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." Everything in its order. When wit has shown its weakness, then God's word comes in and speaks wisdom. When human powers fall prostrate, divine energy produces the desired results. When man gives up, God does the work.

Men are so ignorant of their own hearts that they are incapable of determining what is best for them. Even regenerate men are but partially sanctified and enlightened. But God searches the heart. He understands our whole case. He knows what is most for our good. He sees our strong corruptions and sad deficiencies. When, in mercy to the creature, he comes to heal his spiritual maladies, he does not take counsel of human error and passion. It is right, it is best that he should act according to the wisdom which is infallible. He employs the requisite remedies, and man, in his ignorance, too often says, "If God loved me he would not give me so bitter a cup to drink." But this is man's folly. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Shall human weakness control divine power? Shall finite knowledge prescribe to omniscience? It is the height of wickedness for a worm of the dust to revise the decisions, or rejudge the justice of the Almighty. We should expect God to deal with us in a way, to us incomprehensible, if we did but remember how low, sordid, and narrow, are our views and plans, and how holy, glorious, and eternal are his purposes and designs. We are quite prone to magnify both the good and evil things of time to the disparagement of those of eternity. But when God crosses, afflicts, and mortifies us, he makes us look at the things which are unseen and eternal. If he racks this body with pain, it is that we may think of our house, not made with hands, eternal, and in the heavens. The shaking of this clay tabernacle forces upon us the recollection that this is not our rest, and that we ought to be seeking a heavenly country. If the best man on earth had his own way without divine guidance, he would soon be in full march towards destruction. And how kind is God in wisely and mercifully deciding so many things for us. The man who fears God and loves his little daughter would esteem it a greater affliction to be called on to say when his child should be sick, than he now finds it to nurse her through weeks of disease, close her eyes in death, and then carry her to the grave. God very mercifully bears the heaviest part of all our trials, by marking out our course for us. God is governor.

We are servants. To us belong obedience, submission, acquiescence.

#### REMARKS.

1. The Christian lives and walks by faith, not by sight. Even apostles and prophets did but see through a glass darkly. Paul himself says, "The life, which I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God." As, "without faith, it is impossible to please God," so, without faith, it is impossible to be pleased with God. Every approved act of the Christian's life is, in some sense, a committing of his affairs to the Almighty. One inspired apostle, speaking of faith, calls it "precious faith." Another says that the trial of it is "much more precious than gold." No marvel that such commendations are bestowed on this great virtue. It is of rare excellence. Gold perisheth. But faith shall be changed into the beatific vision. Gold is held alike by God's friends and enemies. Faith is a gift bestowed on none but the elect. Gold is gathered from the earth. Faith is a gift descending from heaven. Gold stands us instead only when it is well with us. Faith enables us to walk in darkness, having no light, and yet to trust in the Lord. "I had fainted unless I had believed." There is a sense in which "gold answers all things, so faith gives the soul propriety in all the rich consolations of the gospel, in all the promises of life and salvation, in all needful blessings; it draws virtue from Christ to strengthen itself, and all other graces." Behold the man of faith pressed by temporal and spiritual distresses. See him in the furnace made seven times hotter than it is wont. They, who stand round about, are scorched by the intensity of the heat. Cry to him and say, Brother, how is it with thee now? If faith is in lively exercise, he replies, "When I am tried I shall come forth as gold seven times purified. I know who it is that has said, I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." With gold we can buy what we need, if it is in the market; but faith supplies all our lack when universal want prevails. When earth does not own what we need, the man with his bags of gold is on a level with the beggar; but at such a time the believer sings, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Our faith is often sorely tried, but God's word says, "The trial of your faith is found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearance of Jesus Christ." What we need is not less labor or less suffering, burdens less heavy or less numerous, trials less sharp or less lasting. No. What we need is stronger faith. The disciples never offered a better prayer than this: "Lord, increase our faith." Faith, like the club of Hercules, beats down all before it. "Faith makes all evil good to us, and all good better." "All the precepts in the law and in the gospel do

hang upon this, Believe." All the comforts and supports of the Christian life depend upon faith. Faint believing produces doubtful walking. Be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Never question his truth, nor doubt his faithfulness. "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." "Have faith in God."

2. As the object of God in all his dealings with his people is his own glory and their eternal good, so they ought heartily to concur in these ends, and labor to promote them. God's glory is more important than the lives of all his creatures. He has made all things for himself. Not an event occurs but for his glory. The death of Lazarus, of Bethany, was to that end. To the same intent is every pang of his suffering people. Nor does he less surely propose the welfare of his hidden ones in their greatest afflictions. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them, who are the called according to his purpose." Let us then concur and co-operate with God in seeking our good and his glory. We ought to be more anxious to get good out of an affliction than to get rid of it. The kindest wish that any can indulge respecting their grieving brethren, is, not that they be tempted no more, but that in all their trials they may not sin, nor charge God foolishly. With these views predominant in us, how many powerful temptations would become powerless. Sometimes the afflicted look upon their trials merely as tokens of God's displeasure against them for their sins. No doubt God has good ground of controversy with us all. But hear the voice from heaven, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." As God did not give us friends, or health, or property, or reputation, chiefly to please us, so neither does he take them away chiefly to afflict or punish us. His ends are high and holy, wise and benevolent. We should remember that what is loss to us is often gain to others. This is always true when one of our friends dies in the Lord. Wherefore let us gird up the loins of our minds and seek, above all things, to glorify God in every visitation, whether grievous or joyous. Let us rejoice in all that he does. "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him." The pious Mr. Jay has explained the allusions here made to natural history. The eaglets are fond of the nest; they love just to eat and sleep, and are reluctant to exert themselves till their dam renders the nest so uncomfortable that they can occupy it no longer. Then they go out upon the rocks or the branches of the trees, and learn to walk. By example, she teaches them to exercise their wings, fluttering over them. Then she bears them on her back to great heights, darts from under them, and compels them to use their wings. Then she makes short circuits in the air, and they follow her. She enlarges the range of her

flight, and still they imitate her till they can rival her, soaring high in the heavens. Sir Humphrey Davy describes the completion of this training: "I once saw a very interesting sight, above one of the crags of Ben Nevis, as I was going on the 20th of August, in the pursuit of black game. Two parent eagles were teaching their offspring—two young birds—the manœuvres of flight. They began by rising from the top of a mountain, in the eye of the sun; it was about mid-day, and bright for this climate. They at first made small circles, and the young birds imitated them; they paused on their wings, waiting till they had made their first flight, and then took a second and larger gyration, always rising towards the sun, and enlarging their circle of flight, so as to make a gradual extended spiral. The young ones still slowly followed, apparently flying better as they mounted; and they continued this sublime kind of exercise, always rising, till they became mere points in the air, and the young ones were lost, and afterwards their parents, to our aching sight." So "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

3. Let us put a watch upon our hearts and lips, lest we should think or say more about God's nature and ways than befits our ignorance and our selfishness. Shall not God do what he will with his own? To us he is not accountable, and it is fearful wickedness to think or speak as if he were. If our reasonings concerning his nature or ways perplex us, it is proof that we have gone too far, and uttered things too wonderful for us. Let us not wade beyond our depth. "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." There is much wickedness in indulging in bold speculations and confident reasonings on the nature and government of God. On such subjects, preconceived and rash opinions are too often allowed to set aside the teachings of Scripture. This is always sinful. To every student of divine things God seems to say: "Take off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground." There is too much occasion given by men for the challenge, "Who art thou that repliest against God?" In the book of Job we see to what fearful lengths even good men may go in proud reasonings on Jehovah's ways. For indulging in this sin God gave a terrible rebuke even to the great patriarch. Would that the folly had ended with the man of Uz. Let us take heed to our ways, that we sin not with our tongues. Yea, let us keep our hearts with all diligence, for out of them are the issues of life. "Pride is increased by ignorance; those assume the most, who know the least." And "to be proud of learning is the greatest ignorance." "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." "With the lowly is wisdom." Have docility. "Most men take least notice of what is plain, as if that were of no use; but puzzle their thoughts, and lose themselves in those vast depths and abysses, which no human understanding can fathom."

Utter not words without knowledge. Think not as the fools. "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God : for God is in heaven and thou upon earth."

4. How excellent are divine things. One says : "Divinity is the haven and Sabbath of all man's contemplations." The subjects, of which it treats, surpass all others in dignity and practical usefulness. It opens to us the glorious fountain of all being and of all blessedness. It tells us whence all creatures came. It gives the true theory of human nature, and teaches man correct views of himself and of his neighbors. It settles the doctrine of an endless life beyond the bounds of time. Its truths have a sovereign efficacy to cheer, guide, and cleanse the soul. For purity, for power, for sublimity, for refreshment, nothing can compare with them. They humble without debasing. They elevate without puffing up. They beget modesty without cowardice. They embolden without impudence. They inspire salutary fear and animating confidence. They give joy without levity. They make men to sorrow after a godly sort, and yet greatly increase their happiness.

To these ends they have a fitness in themselves. Truth is in its very nature excellent. Religious truth is as far above all other verity as mind is above matter, as eternity is more lasting than time, as God is superior to his works. The words of God are spirit and life. They are wisdom. Their entrance gives light. To those who seek him with all the heart, God makes his truth efficacious by special divine influences. Even a heart dead in sin will revive under the energies of truth in the hands of the great sanctifier. "The first creature of God, in the work of the days, was the light of the sense ; the last was the light of reason ; and his Sabbath work ever since is the illumination of his Spirit."

If the study of divine things is not a blessing to any, it is because they are "sensual, having not the Spirit." They are blind and cannot see afar off, and yet are too proud to seek the unction that teacheth all things. They do not in their hearts believe what they know to be true. They restrain prayer before God, even when they hear his servant saying, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not." They obey not, though Christ says, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." They resist not their passions, though the promise is, "The meek will he guide in judgment." Nor do such make proof of the principle—"The hand of the diligent maketh rich." If in this land any man shall not become wise unto salvation, the fault will be his own.

If these things are so, every honest effort to spread the knowledge of God is praiseworthy. A good religious book is worth all it ever costs. To give such a volume is often the noblest charity. To read it with eagerness is to dig after hid treasure. The two great sources of light on divine things are God's works

and God's word. Some err by rejecting the volume of nature, and some by rejecting the volume of inspiration. He who rejects either plays the fool. A pious mind loves to learn lessons concerning God from any source. He who asserts that God teaches nothing by what he does, is as blind and perverse as he who holds that God teaches nothing by what he says. For "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge."

Yet the highest source of divine knowledge is revelation. In it are found all the saving truths of religion. That speaks clearly of the most vital things. How glorious, and yet how free, is the truth: "Things which are revealed belong unto us and unto our children." Of himself, how excellent the revelation God has made: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." These few words give us more true knowledge of God's moral character than all the wise men of old acquired from the whole volume of nature. Revelation is no less clear concerning man's sin and guilt, misery and helplessness. It leaves no doubt respecting either of these. By scores of types, prophecies and promises, it points to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. It assures the conscience of peace by atoning blood. It explains the mystery of sanctification. It pours floods of light on all that needs to be known in order that we may do our duty or maintain solid peace of mind. On the whole subject of God's moral government it is luminous. It goes still further. "Some things, which could not otherwise be read in the book of nature, are legible enough when the lamp of revelation is held up to it." Thus it makes all plain concerning the death both of good and bad men. In the phrase, *death by sin*, we have the cause of all death. In the words, *I am the resurrection and the life*, we have opened to all the pious, a door of hope which shall never be shut. God's word is complete as to our duty and destiny, our privileges and prospects. "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb."

5. We ought not to be offended with the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, nor with the doctrine of the Trinity, nor with any other truth of the gospel, on account of its mysteriousness. It is not more incomprehensible that Christ should have two distinct natures united in one person for ever, than that God should have life in himself. He, who can explain the latter, will never be confounded by the former. How existence can be without production is a knot which no creature can untie. To deny the

self-existence of God is atheism. To doubt it is to tremble over the darkest gulf that ever yawned. Yet who can understand its nature? But the fact is beyond a question. So the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ is clearly revealed in every possible form of speech. He is repeatedly called God and Jehovah. He is said to do divine works, to receive, by God's command, divine honors, and to exercise divine prerogatives. He created all things. He upholds all things. He forgives sins. He made the worlds. He is worshipped by all holy angels and redeemed men. He shall judge the world. These things are so clearly revealed of him that it is perverseness to deny them. Let no man be offended in Christ because of his glory, or the mystery that surrounds him. Were there nothing incomprehensible about him, he would not be able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. If God teaches this doctrine, it is true, whether you comprehend it or not. We know not how the grass grows. It is all mystery to us how soil, and air, and water, are converted into vegetable substances. It is all mystery to us how bread, and honey, and milk, and meat, are converted into blood, and made to nourish our frames. It is indeed a mystery to us how Christ may be both God and man. But, unless we honor the Son as we honor the Father, we shall be found in open rebellion against God. Jesus himself said: "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."

Nor is the glorious mystery of a Trinity of persons in the Godhead offensive to pious minds. It is for a rejoicing that He, who made us, He, who redeemed us, and He, who sanctifies us, is the one eternal, unchangeable, indivisible Jehovah, subsisting in three persons. The favorite objection urged against this doctrine, from the days of Celsus and Lucian, down to this hour is, its mysteriousness. Lucian's "One three, three one" is repeated in our day by persons who would be very unwilling to enrol their names with his, though they take up the ribaldry, and sit in the seat of that ancient scorner. That everything pertaining to God is, in some points, inscrutable, is not denied. Were it otherwise, who could adore him? When I perfectly understand all about a being, I know that he is either my inferior, or my equal, and so I cannot pay him religious worship. The pious Hervey well says: "I am no more surprised that some revealed truths should amaze my understanding, than that the blazing sun should dazzle my eyes." Robert Hall, speaking of inscrutable things in religion, says: "We rejoice that they are mysterious, so far from being ashamed of them on that account; since the principal reason why they are, and must ever continue such, is derived from their elevation, from their *unsearchable riches* and undefinable grandeur." Dr. Leonard Woods, of Andover, says: "The end of our being does not require that we should completely comprehend either the Creator, or the creation. Were we called to exercise dominion over the universe, it would indeed be necessary that we should be omniscient. But for those, whose business it is to obey and submit, omniscience is not necessary. \* \* \* On inquiry, it will appear that all the most

momentous and useful truths relate to objects which are pre-eminently incomprehensible." Bishop Waterland says: "No just objection can be made against the *importance* of any doctrine, from its *mysterious* nature. The most mysterious of all are, in reality, the most important; not because they are mysterious, but because they relate to things *divine*, which must, of course, be mysterious to weak mortals, and, perhaps, to all *creatures* whatever. But even mysterious doctrines have a *bright* side, as well as a *dark* one; and they are *clear* to look upon, though too deep to be *seen through*." Richard Baxter says: "The mystery of the incarnation alone may find you work to search and admire many ages." John Newton says: "If I did not find many things in the Bible proposed rather to my faith than to my reason, I could not receive it as a revelation from God, because it would want the grand characteristic of his majesty." Dr. Scott says: "The mystery of godliness continued a great mystery after the fullest revelation of it. The revelation and belief of it have always been, and are, the beginning and spring of all pious dispositions and affections in the hearts of fallen men, and of all the spiritual worship of God in the world." Bishop Sherlock, no less pertinently observes, that "So far is it from being an objection against the Gospel of Christ, that it contains many wonderful mysteries of the hidden wisdom of God, that, as our case stands, without a mystery, it is impossible for us to be saved: for, since reason and nature cannot find the means of rescuing sinners from punishment, and of making atonement to the justice of God; since they cannot prescribe a proper satisfaction for sin, in which the honor of God and the salvation of men shall be at once consulted; since they cannot remedy the corruption that has spread through the race of mankind, or infuse new principles of virtue and holiness into the souls already subdued to the lust and power of sin; since, if they could procure our pardon for what is past, they cannot secure us for the future from the same temptations, which by fatal experience we know we cannot withstand: since, I say, these things cannot be done by the means of reason and nature, they must be done by such means as reason and nature know nothing of; that is, in other words, they must be done by mysterious means, of the propriety of which we can have no adequate notion or conception.

"If you stand in need of no new favor, if you aim not so high as eternal life, religion without mysteries may well serve your turn. The principles of natural religion tend to procure the peace and tranquillity of this life; and the not distinguishing between religion as a rule of life for our present use and well-being here, and as the means of obtaining pardon for sin and eternal life hereafter, may have in some measure occasioned the great complaint against the mysteries of the gospel: for mysteries are not indeed the necessary parts of religion, considered only as a rule of action; but most necessary they are to it, when considered as a means of obtaining pardon and eternal glory.

And this farther shows, how unreasonably men object against the mysterious wisdom of the gospel, since all that the gospel prescribes to us as our duty is plain and evident; all that is mysterious is on God's part, and relates entirely to the surprising acts of divine wisdom and mercy in the redemption of the world. Consider the gospel then as a rule of action, no religion was ever so plain, so calculated upon the principles of reason and nature; so that natural religion itself had never more natural religion in it. If we consider the end proposed to us, and the means used to entitle us to the benefit of it, it grows mysterious, and soars above the reach of human reason; for God has done more for us than reason could teach us to expect, or can now teach us to comprehend. Let us then do our part, which we plainly understand, and let us trust in God that he will do his; though it exceeds the strength of human wisdom to comprehend the length and depth and breadth of that wisdom and mercy, which God has manifested to the world through his Son Christ Jesus our Lord." Nor does God's word teach any different doctrine. In fact, it fully supports these views. Paul said: "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." Let us love all that God has spoken. If it fills us with reverence and godly fear, if it humbles us in the dust, if it awakens pious wonder, if it stirs us up to diligence in looking into these things, it must be of excellent use. But to carp at God's word, or any portion thereof, is both criminal and dangerous. Let every man beware, lest Christ and his salvation, be to him for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence; for a gin and for a snare; for many among men shall stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.

6. What madness it is for any creature to be found fighting against God. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. He hides himself, and all nature stands aghast. He passes by, and a great and strong wind rends the mountains, and breaks in pieces the rocks. He utters his voice, and the earth melts. He wills it, and a world arises. He frowns, and the pillars of heaven tremble. "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. \* \* All nations are before him as nothing." "He bringeth princes to nothing." "He maketh the judges of the earth as vanity." Before him, the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers. Who can resist such a God? Some have fought against him, but who ever conquered him or escaped a certain overthrow? Was there ever a company of more consummate fools than Pharaoh and his great men, although they thought to "deal wisely." Behold the horse and his rider, the warrior and the chariot, sunk like lead in the mighty waters. "The Lord is a man of war.

\* \* \* He hath triumphed gloriously. \* \* \* Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" Let every

man know that the Lord, he is God, and that to put one's self in array against him is to advertise the whole universe that he is a fool, bent on his own eternal undoing. A feather can never resist the fires of a furnace, the elements cannot withstand the intense heat of the last day; neither can a worm of the dust stand out against God. Sin is as foolish as it is criminal. If, in temporal affairs, any man violated the laws of his existence, as in spiritual affairs every wicked man does, any court would pronounce him a madman, and subject him to the restraints of a lunatic asylum. Wisdom says: "Whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the LORD. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death." To think of God's wrath is fearful. To taste it is worse than a potion of wormwood and gall. To endure it is intolerable. A drop of it fell into the conscience of Belshazzar, and his knees smote together; of Herod, and he gave up the ghost; of Judas, and he turned suicide. A few drops of it have sent the voice of wailing along every valley and over every mountain in a great nation. A sprinkle of it fell on sinning angels, and, in a moment, they shrivelled into devils. A vial of it broken on our globe will yet send it blazing through the universe. The fierceness of that wrath will cow the spirit of devils, and make sinners of our race wish they had never been born. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath."

7. With so great a God, great sinners may hope to find great mercy. He punishes, but He also pardons, like a God. He shows compassion to the chief of sinners. His loving-kindness reaches to the heavens. If any of us shall not be saved, it will not be because God is not merciful; but because we are proud, rebellious, and self-righteous. Sometimes we think our sins too great to be pardoned by the Lord. But this is because of our wicked unbelief. Hear his own words of love; "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Such offers ought to silence all our cavils, and put to shame all our unbelief. If we knew more of God, we should be less apt to distrust him. He, who has spent all his days among the mountains which lift their brows above the clouds, and has never seen any body of water greater than the mountain torrent, may naturally doubt whether there is water enough on earth to cover the peaks of his native land. But let him once cross the Atlantic, let him put down his lead thousands of fathoms, let him find that it is three thousand miles wide and yet greater in length, and he will see how all his native mountains could be buried in the sea. So our sins are great, truly as great as we ever thought them to be. But God's mercy is greater than we have ever imagined. Let us explore it and meditate upon it, till we see how He can pardon iniquity, pass by transgression, delight in mercy, have compassion on us, and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

8. The true glory of churches is the presence and blessing of

Jehovah. The great difference between the two houses that Solomon built was, that one was his own domicile, while the other was an habitation for the Lord. The great difference between a saint and a sinner is, that one is the temple of Belial, and the other the temple of the Lord. In monarchical governments, it is esteemed a great honor to live or to worship in the same house with the king. But wherever churches are animated with real love to God, the King of kings blesses the place of their meeting with his presence. This is honor indeed. What a glorious promise is that, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The fulfilment is as certain as the blessing promised is inestimable. How foolish are we when we put our confidence in means and men, in singers and preachers, to make the sanctuary a delight. They may provide for the proprieties of things. Even a corpse may be decently arrayed. But if the place of meeting is to be made to our souls the house of God, and the gate of heaven, if we, who are naturally dead in trespasses and sins, are to be made alive unto God, it must be by the gracious presence of Him whose we are, and whom we serve. Let God's people never weary of looking to Him, who is the glory of his people Israel. Let them never vainly imagine that they are anything, or can do anything as of themselves. Without him they can do nothing. That was a wise prayer of Moses, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." If God go before us, our enemies shall be scattered. If he be our rereward, our enemies shall not overtake us. If he be our portion, we shall not want. If he be our glory, we shall be eternally illustrious.

9. What a capital error is that which teaches that God can be fitly represented or worshipped by images. To bow down to the sun, moon, and stars, and worship all the host of heaven, or to "change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible men, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things," ought to be by all people held and declared idolatry. In his being, perfections, works, and ways, God is incomparable. "Among the gods, there is none like thee, O LORD; neither are there any works like unto thy works." "Who in the heavens can be compared unto the LORD; who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?" "To whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" The greatness of the sin of worshipping images, or of worshipping God by images, arises from these facts: It is positively forbidden in many portions of Scripture; it is contrary to God's spirituality; it degrades all our conceptions of Jehovah to a depth of debasement intolerable to God. "We ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." The spirit of the first and the letter of the second commandment forbid such worship. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the ini-

quity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me ; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." In his address to Israel given us in the *fourth* chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses greatly insists upon the exclusion of images from religious worship. Besides, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." God is not in any way personally connected with matter. He is an uncreated, immaterial substance. He is an active, intelligent, infinite spirit. The Belgic confession well says: "We believe in heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only and simple spiritual essence, which we call God, eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, who is wholly wise, and a most plentiful well-spring of all good things." We cannot too carefully guard God's worship against all corruptions, all admixtures of human inventions. Image worship is abominable idolatry. The Most High is not like the gods of the heathen. He dwelleth not in temples made with hands. Because he fills heaven and earth he cannot be placed in a niche or on the altar of any house. Nor can any true image of him be made or conceived. The most exquisite piece of art is no more like God, and is no more suited to give us just ideas of him, than the most unsightly daub, or the rudest block of wood or stone.

10. How amiable is the whole character of God. Love to him is as reasonable as it is obligatory. When a scoffing infidel thought to perplex a pious little girl, by asking, "How big is your God?" she replied, "He is so great that the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, yet he is so kind as to dwell in this little heart of mine." He dwells with all his people. He walks in them. "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." What matchless love is here! He who is over all God blessed forever, condescends to take up his abode in our hearts. "The tabernacle of God is with men." He that is higher than the highest, does not despise our low estate. How hateful is the arrogant littleness of man, compared with the condescending greatness of God. Our God is in the heavens, and yet he is the great comforter of man. If this is so, how we should love and fear, serve and obey, praise and adore him. "We should give him the same place in our hearts that he holds in the universe." We shall never be able to pay the debt we owe him. Let us give him all. Even that is but little; yet he will receive it.

Maker! Preserver! my Redeemer! God!  
 Whom have I in the heavens but Thee alone?  
 On earth, but thee, whom should I praise, whom love?  
 For thou hast brought me hitherto, upheld  
 By thy Omnipotence; and from thy grace  
 Unbought, unmerited, though not unsought—  
 The wells of thy salvation, hast refreshed  
 My spirit, watering it at morn and eve.  
 GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST.



